

MAGIC AND COMMON SENSE

Tab, tab!—'Kill, kill!'—in the hopes of finding a dead ¹⁷⁵121
bird under the wreckage. The villagers hoard their pig- ⁷⁸⁹
jaws partly as mementoes and trophies, but also, as they
sometimes explain, to ensure subsequent success in the
hunt. To throw away the jaws where they would be lost
to sight in the bush would be in some manner to throw
away the hunter's chance of catching pigs. A pregnant ¹²¹
woman who desires a male child conceals a mangrove ⁸⁴³
stamen under her bark-cloth skirt. The stamen is said to
resemble a penis, and so its influence in the matter of sex-
determination is obvious enough. As far as I know the
woman uses no other medicine, i.e. no specific, to help
the mangrove stamen in its work. A pregnant woman ¹²¹
who desires no child at all will slash the skin of a cucum- ⁸⁴⁷
ber about its middle, and then slash herself about the
middle: the cucumber rots and the woman has a mis-
carriage. This is only one of the many methods of
abortion—old wives' remedies which are really made
effective by pummelling and violence. It is not a secret,
and in this case, as far as I know, there is no mysterious
medicine.

Now it is hard to come by an explanation, a rationale, ¹²¹
of his own magic from a native. In so far as set methods
have replaced originality in magic the native learns these
methods without troubling as to their why and where-
fore. Where there is originality the magic is, as we shall
see, more impulsive than rational. In either case he does
not think the methods out. But sometimes a rather
exceptional informant can explain them or give their
reasons. And, indeed, to one who sees much of native
magic, these methods take on a sort of obviousness.
The obviousness, however, the why and wherefore,
appertain to the procedure, not to the specific. They stop
short at what is really the unknown factor. The man
who goes through the whole magical practice may feel
tolerably clear as to the significance of the procedure, but
he can have only a blind faith in the specific.

Given, therefore, that in what we call native magic